

Among the learning activities for students who participate in the Grief Outreach Initiative is an oral and written case study of the mentor-mentee relationship they have had with a child. Preparation for the case study is reflection, a key characteristic of service learning (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2011) that is significantly correlated with personal development (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997). The purpose of an analysis of this assignment was to describe the grief-related service learning experience from the student's perspective and to identify its impact on a student's character development. The framework for the analysis were the findings of Dalton and Crosby (2011) that identified key attributes of character development in practice in higher education, and specifically, Reed et al. (2005) who identified four specific character development areas that service learning can influence: 1) social responsibility, 2) awareness of social problems, 3) meaningfulness of college life, and 4) expectations for future commitment to service. Supporting evidence that confirmed the findings were a final reflection paper and the class discussion of the case study.

Analysis of the case study and the two supporting criteria validate the key attributes of character development noted by Reed et al. (2005) specifically for service-learning initiatives. Although a single case study, the findings offer both practical implications for community engagement as well as several directions for future research. Among them are the practical implications such as supervision, training, student motivations, and most importantly, unresolved issues related to students' own grief, loss, or both.

References

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